

Under Fire

New Video Games Drawing Heat Here From All Directions

By Therese Madonia

The tick tock, tick tock drove the little dot relentlessly through the maze as it passed blue dots representing gas cans, pushed on by the green trail, a hissing fuse.

As the dot rushed through, knocking over the gas cans that led to purple spills, dousing the walls of the maze, blue crackling fire appeared on the screen. As the fuse caught the dot before it reached the staircase, the message, "You've made an ash of yourself appeared." Another, more successful run through the maze with the dot fleeing safely down the stairs, elicited the message, "Thank you for a nice fire."

The display demonstrated the latest in video games, not for eager purchasers or players, but a group of county officials and representatives of organizations who are angry at that and another video game that has yet to reach the market.

Religious, feminist and community leaders gathered, last week, to discuss methods of halting local distribution of *Firebug* which is available at some locations throughout the county and *Custer's Revenge*, depicting the rape of an Indian woman, a game which is not yet available for purchase here.

Suffolk County Legislator Philip Nolan (D-Brentwood) told the assembled group, "Rape and arson are not games," and explained that he hoped to push through emergency legislation this week to ban the sale of both games in Suffolk.

He was backed in his intention to legislate a ban by former county District Court Judge Paul Creditor, a candidate for the Seventh County Legislative District seat. Citing Mr. Creditor's expertise with First Amendment matters, Mr. Nolan indicated he is seeking the legislation because of the "imminent danger" the games represent.

Mr. Creditor explained that because of the active, participatory nature of the games which depict acts of rape and arson, classified as criminal, they are not protected under the first amendment. "In essence, these games may create an atmosphere in which violent crimes appear to be socially acceptable pursuits, and as such, would present an imminent danger to public health and safety."

County Consumer Affairs Commissioner Ken Rosenblum disagreed with the need for a legislated ban on the games. He indicated that he is planning to meet with local merchants to request that they voluntarily agree not to stock the games. "I'm concerned that we are being delegated standard setting. The business community hasn't been given an opportunity to speak and I believe in the good faith of most busi-

nesses." He explained that he will meet with arcade owners to attempt to generate a voluntary agreement not to make the games available to the public. He was also requested to develop voluntary guidelines on the acceptability of video games which are sold, distributed or offered for public use in the county.

He commented that "Legislation is the final, most expensive, most coercive alternative," and later added, "I am worried about the government acting as parent."

Representatives of the National Organization of Women, Victims Information Bureau of Suffolk, St. Luke's Church and the Suffolk County Volunteer Firemen's Association protested the games which they said were racist, sexist and encourage arson.

County Legislator Peter Cohalan later said he is asking for a citizens' boycott of the *Custer's Revenge* game as well as calling for the manufacturer, American Multiple Industries, to refrain from distributing the game. "The type of activity portrayed in this so-called game should not be taken lightly. Rape is a serious crime and I, for one, do not think it should be trivialized or glorified."

Game Ban Postponed Until Nov.

A request by an Islip legislator for the Suffolk County Legislature to consider emergency legislation that could lead to a ban of two controversial video games was squashed, Tuesday, postponing the consideration until November 9.

Legislator Philip Nolan's (D-Brentwood) request that two bills to control video game distribution in the county be granted a certificate of necessity to permit immediate action on the bills was denied by County Executive Peter Cohalan.

Both bills will be considered at the next legislative session. Sparked by a local outcry against the games (see related story), *Custer's Revenge* and *Firebug*, one bill would permit the County Attorney's Office to take legal action against games deemed to be an "imminent danger" to the public and the second would require the Consumer Affairs Commissioner to establish voluntary guidelines for those who lease, sell or distribute the games.
